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Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

Summary record of the 19th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 28 October 2005, at 10 a.m.

Chairman:	Mr. Aliyev	(Azerbaijan)
later:	Mr. Gerts (Vice-Chairman)	(Netherlands)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 28: Effects of atomic radiation (A/60/46)

1. **Mr. Crick** (Secretary of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation) said that, until his recent appointment, he had for over two decades been a keen user of the substantive scientific reports produced by the Scientific Committee, which were held in very high esteem by the international scientific community and formed the basis of standards for radiation protection.

2. There had admittedly been recent budgetary problems that impinged upon the Scientific Committee's work, but it was his understanding that the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was making arrangements to address those issues so that the Scientific Committee could work reliably and effectively.

3. April 2006 would mark the twentieth anniversary of the Chernobyl accident; the spotlight would therefore also be on the Scientific Committee since it had played an important role in providing the scientific basis for understanding radiation-induced health effects. The year 2006 would also mark the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Scientific Committee itself, and would be an occasion to reflect on the challenges ahead.

4. **Mr. Yamamoto** (Japan, Chairman of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation) said that, since its establishment by the General Assembly in 1955, the Scientific Committee had served the vital function of providing authoritative scientific review of the sources and effects of ionizing radiation. Although its original mandate had been to assess and report levels and effects of exposure to ionizing radiation, the role of the Committee had been adapted to address new challenges arising from radiation exposure, such as diseases other than cancer, effects on the immunological system and effects on non-human biota. As a result, Governments and organizations throughout the world now relied on the Scientific Committee's estimates as the scientific basis for evaluating radiation risk, establishing radiation protection and safety standards and regulating radiation sources. Within the United Nations system, those estimates were used by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in the discharge of its statutory functions of establishing health standards with respect to radiation and providing for their application. In addition, the information provided by the Scientific Committee assisted the General Assembly in making recommendations, in particular those relevant to international cooperation in the health field.

5. The year 2006 would mark the twentieth anniversary of the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. In that connection, he welcomed the Scientific Committee's continuous contribution in providing the scientific background for a better understanding of the radiation health effects of that accident. There was some concern, however, that the current level of funding for the Scientific Committee's work was inadequate, that would result in a diminished effectiveness at a time when authoritative reviews of the effects of radiation were likely to take on increasing importance.

6. Introducing the draft resolution which was to be circulated (A/C.4/60/L.8), he explained that it requested the Scientific Committee to continue to review the important problems in the field of ionizing radiation. It also requested UNEP to continue to provide support for the effective conduct of the work of the Scientific Committee, and to review and strengthen the current funding, so that the Scientific Committee could discharge its responsibilities and mandate. He hoped that the draft resolution would be adopted by consensus.

7. **Mr. La Rosa Dominguez** (Cuba) said that the Scientific Committee was a source of specialized, balanced and objective information, and that the high quality of its reports made them reference documents for the adoption of national and international standards for protecting the public against the effects of ionizing radiation.

8. The current year marked the sixtieth anniversary of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki massacres, in which many thousands had died as a result of the atomic bombs dropped on them without the slightest respect for human life, and many thousands more as a result of the lingering effects of radiation. His country reaffirmed its strong opposition to the use of nuclear energy for purposes of war and its unwavering commitment to the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

9. The health effects of the Chernobyl accident, one of the items discussed by the Scientific Committee at its fifty-third session, was especially important in view

of the fact that 2006 would mark the twentieth anniversary of that event. Earlier in 2005, Cuba and Ukraine had themselves commemorated the fifteenth anniversary of a humanitarian programme under which child victims of Chernobyl for whom there were no facilities in Ukraine had been brought to Cuba for treatment and rehabilitation. His country was pleased that, despite an illegal blockade by the United States Government which had had an impact on its health sector, particularly on that programme, it had been able to mitigate in a modest way some of the consequences of the tragic accident. Thus far, over 18,000 children had been treated in Cuba, with 500 to 800 new patients received each year; moreover, since 1998, a small Cuban medical team had been working in Ukraine with a sanatorium for persons with Chernobyl-related injuries, and had thus far treated over 10,000 patients. The humanitarian programme had also had a real scientific impact, having produced primary data on internal contamination in infants, data which had been used by United Nations bodies such as IAEA and the Scientific Committee in their research.

10. The Scientific Committee must continue to forge stronger bonds with the various agencies of the United Nations system, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), IAEA and UNEP. Their concerted efforts would result in greater benefits for humanity in the areas of health and environmental protection. Budgetary problems must not be allowed to hamper the Scientific Committee's work. His delegation was convinced that serious and wide-ranging cooperation in the peaceful use of atomic energy was the only way to eliminate the potential dangers of ionizing radiation.

11. *Mr. Gerts (Netherlands), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

12. **Mr. Ali Ahmad** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation shared the concern expressed in the report of the Scientific Committee on its fifty-third session (A/60/46) that lack of funding was hampering its work. It hoped that UNEP would increase funding for the biennium 2008-2009 and called on all Member States and United Nations agencies to comply with the Special Committee's requests for information.

13. His country had acceded to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and had negotiated a comprehensive safeguards agreement with IAEA. In 2003 it had submitted a draft resolution to the Security Council to make the Middle East a zone free of weapons of mass destruction, in particular nuclear weapons. His country believed that nuclear radiation was seeping out of Israeli installations directly into neighbouring States and from them into the rest of the world, and would continue to do so unless Israel submitted its nuclear facilities to the IAEA inspection regime in accordance with paragraph 5 of Security Council resolution 487 (1981).

14. The Syrian Arab Republic had drawn attention in other United Nations forums to the dangers of burying nuclear waste in the ground or dumping it at sea. It regarded such acts as violations of international law, especially when carried out without supervision by a competent international agency. Firm international resolve and cooperation was necessary to combat the deadly danger of nuclear radiation.

15. **Ms. Myint** (Myanmar) noted that the Scientific Committee would be celebrating its fiftieth anniversary in March 2006. Her delegation wished to commend it for its tireless efforts over five decades to keep the Member States well informed about sources of ionizing radiation and its effects on human health and the environment. Its assessments provided the scientific foundation used by the International Commission on Radiological Protection in developing its recommendations on radiation protection and by the relevant agencies in the United Nations system in formulating the International Basic Safety Standards for Protection against Ionizing Radiation and for the Safety of Radiation Sources.

16. Facing limited resources in fossil fuels, mankind had to turn to nuclear power as an alternative source of energy. With the growing use of nuclear power came the increased risk of exposure to atomic radiation through leakage and nuclear accidents, such as that at Chernobyl, which still haunted the collective memory. Her country was also troubled by the danger posed by the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the possibilities of their falling into the hands of terrorists. The danger of atomic radiation remained an important issue not only to countries that had suffered from the results of nuclear tests or accidents, but also to those exposed to the dangers stemming from other sources of radiation such as nuclear electricity generation and exposure to man-made or naturally occurring sources.

17. Myanmar was one of the countries that had been exercising the legitimate right of peaceful use of atomic energy for development purposes in cooperation

with IAEA. It was highly appreciative of the sustained assistance provided to it by IAEA, in particular in the areas of medicine, agriculture, human resources development, nuclear engineering and technology and nuclear safety, radiotherapy, nuclear methods of diagnosis and nuclear technique for medical research and industry. With the help of IAEA, Myanmar had embarked on a programme of promoting and developing nuclear applications. It was aware of the need for adequate radiation protection and waste safety infrastructure. Its regulations for the safe use of radiation and nuclear energy were almost complete. Myanmar was a party to the Regional Cooperative Agreement for the Asia and Pacific region, under the auspices of IAEA.

18. Given the critical role of the Scientific Committee, her delegation called for an adequate operating budget to be allocated to it. It also hoped that UNEP would provide additional resources for it in the biennium 2006-2007, since its work fully deserved the continued support and cooperation of all Member States and the relevant United Nations specialized agencies.

19. **Mr. Williams** (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that the Scientific Committee remained the principal international body in its field. The quality of its work was such that in the drafting of national and international standards its reports were used as a basis, that in turn protected populations against the effects of ionizing radiation. The European Union fully supported the work programme adopted by the Scientific Committee at its fifty-third session, especially its ongoing work on the health effects of the Chernobyl accident and on the effects of low-dose radiation. Many observers from United Nations agencies and international bodies had attended the Scientific Committee's session, and he welcomed the exchange of information and cooperation. The European Union reiterated its full support for the Scientific Committee and the essential, authoritative and independent information it produced.

20. **Ms. Karun** (Ukraine) said that her delegation was looking forward to the publication by the Scientific Committee of the detailed scientific annexes to a 2006 report to the General Assembly mentioned in its report (A/60/46, para. 5). All Member States, specialized agencies and other international and national scientific bodies should, as requested by the Scientific Committee, provide information to ensure the completeness of its reviews.

21. Her delegation was concerned that the effectiveness of the Scientific Committee's work might be diminished owing to an inadequate operating budget, especially when public interest was expected to increase at the time of the twentieth anniversary of the Chernobyl accident and the forthcoming revision of the International Basic Safety Standards for Protection against Ionizing Radiation and for the Safety of Radiation Sources. She understood, however, that the necessary measures had been taken.

22. Her delegation welcomed the Scientific Committee's participation in the recent Chernobyl Forum and expected that it would continue to provide the scientific basis for a better understanding of radiation-induced health effects. The twentieth anniversary of the Chernobyl accident — which had changed the world's attitude to nuclear energy — would provide an opportunity to review accomplishments and outline a plan for future action. Her Government would on that occasion hold an international conference on the outlook for the future, to which it invited the Scientific Committee and all interested countries and organizations to take part. The Conference would promote the application of up-to-date international expertise on issues such as radiation protection, medical and biological consequences of radiological accidents, and economic and legal aspects of radioactive waste management and the decommissioning of nuclear power plants.

23. Her delegation endorsed the activities planned by the Scientific Committee to commemorate its own fiftieth anniversary, which were aimed at raising awareness of its activities outside the traditional scientific community, and it hoped that, as it pursued its work, the Scientific Committee would call upon his country's considerable expertise in dealing with the effects of radiation.

24. **Mr. Loedel** (Uruguay), speaking on behalf of the countries of the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) and the associated countries Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela, said that it was extremely important for the international community to be able to assess the effects of atomic radiation on those exposed to it, in order to reach scientifically valid conclusions.

25. In view of the concern over radiation contamination of the environment the work that the Scientific Committee was doing on the risks associated with exposure to natural sources of radiation was very valuable, as was its study of radionuclide transfers in the environment. Over the past half century, the kind and quality of work done by the Scientific Committee had made a definite contribution to a safer environment. Its conclusions continued to be recognized and used by major international bodies and United Nations agencies. The Scientific Committee's report on its fifty-third session (A/60/46) confirmed its prestige and the future work programme it had set out deserved support. It had made a good decision to commemorate its own fiftieth anniversary by raising awareness of its activities outside the traditional scientific community.

26. The MERCOSUR and associated countries remained committed to the peaceful use of nuclear energy, and the international agreements and mechanisms to which they were parties guaranteed peaceful use and permitted the free exchange of material and technology among their scientific institutions.

Agenda item 116: Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly

27. **The Chairman** drew attention to document A/C.4/60/WP.2 containing a non-paper on the revitalization of the work of the Fourth Committee, which the Committee had approved earlier in the year and which had now been circulated as a working paper to be used as a reference by the Ad Hoc Working Group on the issue of revitalization. The Committee would consider it, together with its draft programme of work for the sixty-first session, at a subsequent meeting.

28. **Mr. Maleki** (Islamic Republic of Iran), referring to paragraph 11 of the non-paper, asked whether the General Committee or the General Assembly would decide whether the item "Effects of atomic radiation" should remain on the Fourth Committee's agenda and if a discussion in the Committee was needed.

29. **The Chairman** said that such issues would be discussed by the Ad Hoc Working Group.

The meeting rose at noon.